

Vatican cleric fuels condom row

By David Willey

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A senior Vatican cardinal has joined the growing number of influential Catholic Church figures questioning the official Vatican ban on condom use.

Cardinal Georges Cottier is one of Pope John Paul II's preferred theologians.

So eyebrows were raised this week when he was quoted as saying the use of condoms may be legitimate to stop the spread of Aids in poor countries.

The cardinal said there was moral justification for condom use under certain circumstances to counter Aids.

Churchmen are arguing with increasing frequency that the traditional blanket ban on the use of condoms is no longer valid.

Cardinal Cottier said it was no longer a question only of allowing the transmission of life, but of actively preventing the transmission of death to a sexual partner.

This argument - of adopting the lesser of two evils - has also been proposed by bishops in France and Spain.

Spanish bishops however were forced by the Vatican to row back on a statement similar to that now made by Cardinal Cottier that they issued in Madrid last month.

The point is that the Vatican is slowly being forced to admit by some of its most authoritative churchmen that this is a complex moral argument which does not allow for a simple overall ban on the use of condoms.

In a nuanced Vatican statement to be put out later this month on the World Day of the Sick, the Pope himself has not ruled out the adoption of less desirable strategies in fighting Aids than those that the Church traditionally teaches.

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